

July 2006



## *American Citizen Newsletter* *U.S. Consulate General Belfast*

### **Dear American Community,**

We have had a busy few months at the Consulate with visits by U.S. Special Envoy Mitchell Reiss, U.S. Ambassador to the UK Robert Tuttle and U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Ireland James Kenny. The joint visit by the two Ambassadors to Newry and Belfast marked the first time in a decade that the U.S representatives in Dublin and London have appeared together in Northern Ireland. While here they focused on the need to seize the initiative to grow the private sector and expand economic cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Both Ambassadors reiterated the United States' continued support for a prosperous and peaceful Northern Ireland.

Happy Birthday America!

Regards,

Dean Pittman  
Consul General

### **Social Services News: Foreign Enforcement Questionnaires**

On June 8th, the Social Security Administration (SSA) sent out more than a quarter of a million Foreign

Enforcement Questionnaires to beneficiaries living overseas. Beneficiaries are mailed these questionnaires every two years.

It is extremely important that the questionnaires be completed and mailed back to the SSA. The purpose of the questionnaire is to detect unreported changes that may affect one's ongoing eligibility to benefits (e.g., marriage, divorce, death, etc). Failure to mail back the form will result in suspension of benefits.

Quite often, those with direct deposit fail to report changes of addresses to the SSA. Their questionnaires are then mailed to the wrong address and eventually benefits are suspended. Therefore, it is important that beneficiaries with direct deposit keep the SSA informed of their new address when they move. The reports should be mailed to the Federal Benefits Unit at the Embassy in London.

For questions and inquiries, contact the Federal Benefits Unit at Embassy London at 0207-499-9000, Option 2, then Option 6 (Pensions and Federal Benefits), or email at [IN.GB.FSP.London@ssa.gov](mailto:IN.GB.FSP.London@ssa.gov).

## **Erroneous IRS denials of filing extension requests**

The London IRS office was recently informed that the Austin Processing Center erroneously rejected a large number of Forms 4868, Applications for Automatic Extension of Time to File U.S. Individual Income Tax Return. The Form 4868 provides an automatic six-month extension to file until October 16. The form must be filed by overseas taxpayers by June 15. Most of the erroneous rejections occurred in April. The Austin Processing Center has identified the errors and is in the process of making corrections. A corrected letter will be sent to each taxpayer who received an erroneous denial letter.

## **Update for Veterans Overseas**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has recently learned that information for up to 26.5 million veterans and some spouses, as well as personal information on as many as 1.1 million military members on active duty, 430,000 members of the National Guard, and 645,000 members of the Reserves, was stolen. The VA is working with members of Congress, the news media and veteran service organizations to ensure that veterans and their families are aware of the situation and know the steps to take to protect themselves from misuse of their personal information.

Veterans can go to [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov) get more information on this matter. They can also visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) to search for more information on the theft of this data.

## **Planning Ahead for Summer Travel**

With the summer travel season upon us, air travelers are urged to plan ahead for security procedures at the airport. Because of the heavy passenger traffic expected throughout the summer, the U.S. Transportation Security Administration has created a "Summer Travel Website" to minimize delays by helping passengers prepare for the screening process. Following a few simple guidelines will help make passenger screening as efficient as possible. Visit their website at:

<http://www.tsa.gov/public/display?theme=40&content=090005198013fe99>

Also, be sure to check out information from the U.S. Department of State on traveling abroad. Go to [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety\\_1747.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1747.html) and [http://travel.state.gov/news/info/press/press\\_2833.html](http://travel.state.gov/news/info/press/press_2833.html).

## **Unofficial Tips for Americans Abroad**

The UK and U.S. press have both recently reported on a "World Citizens Guide" offering tips for American citizens living, working, studying and touring abroad. Despite what some press reports state, the guide is not a U.S. government publication. Published by the organization Business for Diplomatic Action, the guide was based on information gathered from people in 130 countries. Contributors were asked for ten pieces of advice that they would give to Americans traveling abroad. Students at Southern Methodist University in Texas compiled the advice and other

useful information into a passport-sized guide.

For more information on the guide, please visit:  
<http://www.businessfordiplomaticaction.org/take/strategy.html>  
<http://www.businessfordiplomaticaction.com/news/press.php>  
<http://www.smu.edu/newsinfo/releases/04025.html>

### Avian Flu Update

We encourage you to visit regularly websites that have information about avian influenza, as they are updated frequently.  
 For general information on avian flu see USINFO Department of State website [http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global\\_issues/bird\\_flu.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/bird_flu.html). This site includes links (under Resources) to World Health Organization and The Center for Disease Control. You can find information from the UK Department of Health at [www.dh.gov.uk/pandemicflu](http://www.dh.gov.uk/pandemicflu) and <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/guide.pdf>.



### Register to Vote

All American citizens are reminded that 2006 is an election year in the United States. On November 7, 2006, we will be electing 33 U.S. Senators, the entire House of Representatives and 37 state Governors. Overseas citizens are eligible to participate in primary, run-off, and special elections that occur throughout

the year, as well as the general elections in November. A calendar of election dates is available at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/primarycal.html>. You are encouraged to register to vote and/or request absentee ballots as early in the year as possible to ensure that you will receive all ballots for which you are eligible.

In many states, voter registration can now be done online. Please visit <http://www.fvap.gov/links/statelinks.html> to link to your state's website.

### Maintaining Lawful Permanent Resident Status

In general, persons who acquire Lawful Permanent Resident Status (aka "Green Card" status) in the United States are presumed to intend to reside in the United States. If you, or your family member, do not intend to actually establish residence in the United States, we do not recommend that you apply for an immigrant visa.

Each time a permanent resident re-enters the United States after an absence abroad, he or she is subject to inspection by an immigration official who will determine whether or not that person has abandoned their status as a permanent resident. Although there is a technical requirement to not be out of the United States more than one year without obtaining a reentry permit, it does not follow that you can maintain permanent residence simply by entering the United States for a one or two week vacation each year while continuing to reside abroad.

You may be found to have abandoned your permanent resident status IF you:

- Move to another country intending to live there permanently.
- Remain outside the US for more than one year without obtaining a reentry permit or returning resident visa. However, in determining whether your status has been abandoned any length of absence from the US may be considered, even if it is less than one year.
- Remain outside the US for more than two years after issuance of a reentry permit without obtaining a returning resident visa. However, in determining whether your status has been abandoned any length of absence from the US may be considered, even if it is less than one year.
- Fail to file income tax returns while living outside the US for any period.
- Declare yourself a "nonimmigrant" on your tax returns.

You can go to the USCIS website for more helpful information at <http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/howdoi/PermRes.htm>

### Cultural Corner

The U.S Consulate General occasionally provides partial grants for cultural events which have an American element. Some of the events are free, for others there is a charge. In this quarter, we encourage you to check out:

**Rockabilly Festival – June 30 - July 2**  
Loud Promotions in association with Laganside bring some of the world's

best Rockabilly acts to Belfast. Go to [www.belfastcity.gov.uk/maritimefestival2006/rockabilly.asp](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/maritimefestival2006/rockabilly.asp)

**American Independence Day Celebrations –Ulster American Folk Park - July 1 -6** – Check out the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations at the Ulster American Folk Park in Omagh! One of the highlights will be re-enactments from the American War of Independence. Find out more at:

<http://www.discovernorthernireland.com/product.aspx?ProductID=7720>

**Bluegrass Festival – Ulster American Folk Park – September 1 – 3** - A must see for fans of Bluegrass and American Folk music. It is one of the largest festivals of its kind. Find out more at: <http://www.discovernorthernireland.com/product.aspx?ProductID=8918>

### Consulate Closure Dates

The Consulate will be closed on the following dates:

**Tuesday, July 4, Independence Day**  
**Wednesday, July 12 & Thursday, July 13, Orangemen's Holiday**  
**Monday, August 28, Summer Bank Holiday**  
**Monday, September 4, Labor Day**

#### Contact Information:

**American Citizen Services:**  
**02890-386104**

For all other inquiries, please contact our office via email:  
[consularbelfast@state.gov](mailto:consularbelfast@state.gov)

In the case of a life or death emergency of an American Citizen, the out-of-hours phone number is  
**0870-2385428**